An Autobiographical Fragment

"Tu mihi curarum requies, tu nocte vel atra lumen, et in solis tu mihi turba locis"*

This, the final issue of the Bi-Weekly, is dedicated in gratitude to my wife, Esther. Her collaboration, her unfailing understanding, and her sheer genius as a wife and mother, have made the years together joyous and fruitful.

*—*Tibullus IV:13, "You are the solace of my cares, light in the blackest night and company in lonely places"*

I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly

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Notes On Closing, But Not In Farewell

Last September I had been a Washington correspondent for 31 years. Next February I will have been a newspaperman for 50. This month represents a double milestone. In December, 1933, I made my debut in the Big City, as an editorial writer on the *New York Post* for J. David Stern who had just purchased it. This month also marks the completion of 19 years for the *Weekly*, now *Bi-Weekly*. Regretfully, this is the last issue. I will be 64 this month and I have decided to heed the familiar warning signals and shift to a less exacting pace. On January 1, I move to the *New York Review of Books* as a contributing editor. I have written for it off and on with pleasure since 1964 and look forward to a new challenge. I also have in mind a major work on the problem of freedom.

Publisher at 14

In this final issue it seemed appropriate to talk a little about myself. Almost as far back as I can remember I wanted to be a newspaperman. At 14, while in my sophomore year at high school in Haddonfield, N.J., the small town in which I grew up, I began to publish a monthly called *The Progress*. The very first issue struck that note of impractical idealism which was, I suppose, to become characteristic. I attacked Hearst for his Yellow Peril campaign and called for the cancellation of the World War I debts on condition that the debtor nations agree to a 25-year holiday from the arms race. The paper was printed in the job shop of a local weekly, and the linotypist, after setting some of these early radical effusions, opined between meditative squirts of tobacco juice, that I would come to a bad end.

The paper was a commercial success. It carried advertising I obtained after school on my bicycle from merchants in the area. But my father, returning from a convalescence to find me a publisher, wisely made me stop publication after three issues when it became clear that I was falling behind in my school work. This draconian measure was too late. Within a few months I was working for a local weekly paper, and in my junior year I became a full-fledged reporter. J. David Stern, who owned the Camden, N.J. *Evening Courier*, stopped by my father's store one Saturday night, said he had heard of me and asked whether I would like to cover Haddonfield for his paper. That at 15 was the real beginning of my career. I was a natural at the business from the start. But one result of working as a reporter after school is that I graduated from high school 49th in a class of 52, was turned down by Harvard (which I still long to attend) and made it—thanks to open enrollment for high schools in the Philadelphia area—to the University of Pennsylvania.

Some Valedictory Tributes

I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly has been packing more hard and important news into its four pages than many a newspaper carries on 20 times that many pages every day in the week . . . It is a comfort to know that this wise, good and most civilized of reporters will continue to speak out.

—From an editorial in the Boston Globe *12/9.*

His achievement can be traced to a striking independence of mind—independence from government press handouts, independence from political dogma, and an even more difficult kind of independence, the independence to take up causes unpopular even with his own readers . . . In an age of mass organization, Stone has demonstrated that personal journalism can exert a major influence.

—From an editorial in the Los Angeles Times *12/8.*

I. F. Stone, Bane of Liars in Govt, Closing up Shop

—Headline in the New York Post, *December 7.*

I loved learning and hated school. I devoured books from the moment I first learned to read but resisted every effort to make me study whatever I saw no sense in learning. A few teachers I loved, the rest I despised. At college I was a philosophy major, and Penn had two philosophy teachers of stature, Newbold and Singer, whom I revered. I thought I might teach philosophy but the atmosphere of a college faculty repelled me; the few islands of greatness seemed to be washed by seas of pettiness and mediocrity. The smell of a newsroom was more attractive. I was full of romantic nonsense and looked down on college degrees as artificial. I quit college in my junior year, when I was working 10 hours afternoon and night after school on the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. In the mornings, feeling like Jude the Obscure (how I loved Hardy's dark vision in those days!), I would go to the library and read. The high points of my self-education in that period were two books of the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius in Latin and one poem of Sappho's in Greek. The other books I gobbled are too numerous to mention, but I still feel like a drop-out whose education was cut short.

I became a radical early. The first book I remember which began (about 12) to open my eyes to the modern world was Jack London's *Martin Eden*. By the time I was *bar mitzvah* I had read Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* and become an atheist. My idol a few years later was Kropotkin. Engels' *Socialism Scientific and Utopian* was enthralling and I joined the Socialist party, becoming a member of the New Jersey State Executive Committee before I was old enough to vote.

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But Kropotkin's communist anarchism, his vision of a voluntary society without police or oppression of any kind, seemed to me then and still seems now the noblest human ideal.

For La Follette in 1924

My basic attraction to anarchism did not keep me from more normal politics. In 1924 I was for La Follette, the Progressive candidate for President. In 1928, though I had considerable respect for Al Smith, I worked as a volunteer for Norman Thomas. I immensely admired his capacity to deal with American problems in Socialist terms but in language and specifics that made sense to ordinary Americans. I was a passionate anti-Fascist and got into trouble with the business manager of the Camden, N.J., *Courier* after I was sent to cover a Rotary Club meeting on Italy. The speaker was a pro-Fascist propagandist. I denounced him from the press table when he was through. Fortunately for me the *Courier's* editorial policy was anti-Fascist, despite the presence of a large Italian minority in Camden which was for the most part unthinkingly pro-Fascist. Though nominally Republican in what was then a G.O.P. stronghold, the *Courier* fought the local Republican machine, praised La Follette and was the only paper in the Camden-Philadelphia area which was pro-Sacco and Vanzetti. I quit the paper because the city editor wouldn't let me cover their execution, and walked out of the city room with a $5 bill and an extra pair of socks to hitch hike my way to it—but that is another story.

It sounds strange coming from a loner like myself but I liked just about every boss I ever worked for. The first, a boyhood hero who recently died, was Stern. I worked for him on the Philadelphia *Record* after several stints on the *Courier.* When he bought the *New York Post* in December 1933 I went to New York with him as editorial writer. Among the others were Freda Kirchwey of *The Nation,* a sympathetic and courageous liberal editor, then Ralph Ingersoll who founded PM and John P. Lewis his managing editor. Ingersoll had genius, and taught us all new ways of writing; Lewis was a small town newspaperman who ran a team of temperamental big city intellectuals and won their respect and affection. Then there was the late Joseph Barnes who edited the *New York Star.* The last was Ted O. Thackrey who fought so hard against such heavy odds to keep the New York *Daily Compass* afloat, and had finally to give it up the day before election day in November 1952. Every one of them gave me freedom. They also set an example. In its small way, my newsletter has carried on where they left off.

My first move, when the *Compass* closed, was to ask for my old job back as Washington Editor of *The Nation,* which I held from 1940 to 1946. But *The Nation* was, as usual, in financial difficulties, and I waited several weeks without being able to get either a yes or no answer. There would have been no *Weekly* if *The Nation* had taken me back. I only started the newsletter as a last resort. In the 1948 Arab-Jewish war in Palestine, the Israelis said their secret weapon was *ain breira,* which is Hebrew for "no alternative." That was my situation. I had been thinking of a newsletter for several years. George Seldes had shown the way with his 4-page newsletter *In Fact* a decade earlier. I had seen one experiment after another in liberal-radical journalism go down to defeat. I thought the time had come to cut the cloth to the dwindling market, and try a paper so small and inexpensive it could pay for itself even in bad times. With the help of my energetic and resourceful younger brother, Marc, I set about preparing to launch a newsletter.

When The Poor Marched On Washington

To see the Poor People's March on Washington in perspective remember that the rich have been marching on Washington since the beginning. They came in carriages and they come on jets. They don't have to put up in shanties. Their object is the same but few people are untactful enough to call it handouts . . . The fiscal and banking system of the new Republic was established on the basis of a $20 million handout [to speculators who had bought up defaulted obligations issued to finance the Revolution] and on the Hamiltonian theory that if the new government would channel enough wealth to the top, some of it would eventually trickle down . . . The tax structure and the laws bear the imprint of countless marches on Washington; these have produced billions in hidden grants . . . Across the facade of the U.S. Treasury should be engraved, "To him who hath shall be given."

—From the Weekly *of May 13, 1968.*

The Weekly's Debut: A Criticism of Truman and a Warning Against The Cold War

Mr. Truman fears war, but remains evasive about peace. The meaning of the H-bomb and the new weapons of destruction is that men must learn to live together on the same planet in mutual forbearance . . . But Mr. Truman's emphasis was on his old hope that if cold war and containment were continued long enough the Soviet regime would somehow crack up from within . . . Mr. Truman set the mood and Mr. Acheson coined the phrase for it—"total diplomacy" . . . .

We can impose tension on the Soviet system only by imposing tension on ourselves . . . Mr. Truman warns against "fear that breeds more fear, sapping our faith, corroding our liberties, turning citizen against citizen . . ." But how avoid that fear in a world of mounting tension, hate and war preparations? . . . "Already the danger signals have gone up," Mr. Truman says piously." . . . each new act of enforced conformity, each idle accusation . . . each new restrictive law—is one more sign that we can lose the battle against fear . . ."

Mr. Truman thinks of himself as a liberal. It is at once something subtler and more human than hypocrisy which leads him to say, "We must take our stand on the Bill of Rights. The Inquisition, the star chamber, have no place in a free society." The same capacity for inviting war in the name of peace made it possible for him to launch star chamber loyalty purges and peacetime sedition prosecutions while preaching civl liberties. The man who devoted most of his years in the White House to propagating alarm ends by warning us, "The Communists cannot deprive us of our liberties—fear can."

But how make people accept the heavy burdens of cold war without injecting ever greater doses of fear and suspicion? . . . Washington's Farewell Address had better advice than Truman's. Washington warned . . . that hatred could be one of the most entangling alliances. He said "the nation which indulges toward another an habitual hatred . . . is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity." Only negotiation, coexistence and peace can emancipate us from the campaign of hate and its hateful consequences.

—"Mr. Truman's Farewell Evasions", in the Weekly, *Vol. 1, No. 1, January 17, 1953.*

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Since others may try the same course in the future, the financial details may be interesting. The *Weekly* was made possible first of all because it had a kind of piggy-back launching. The shock of the closing of the *Compass* provided a receptive audience; the existence of mailing lists of *Compass* and *PM* subscribers provided an easy way to reach them. The second factor which made it possible was that I had $3500 severance pay in escrow when the *Compass* closed; and we owned our little home in Washington so our expenses were low, even with three children. Then there was an unexpected angel. A fan, the late Arthur Wiener, took me to lunch in New York and lent a sympathetic ear. I walked down the street, with him after lunch at the Museum of Modern Art. "I'm going to keep on fighting," I told him, "if I have to crank out a paper on a mimeograph machine in the cellar." He loaned me $3,000 without interest (which I am happy to say I repaid in full before he died). There were a few others who helped, but none on that scale. With less than $10,000 in two mailings my brother and I managed to get 5,300 subscribers with which to start, and the *Weekly* made its debut on January 17, 1953.

Despite McCarthyism

Its survival and growth were made possible by several factors. One was the relatively low level of costs at that time. The second class mail rate made it possible to mail the *Weekly* in those days at only one-eighth of a cent per copy, the minimum piece rate then; it is 1.5 cents now. I shall always be grateful that the Postoffice not only granted second class quickly but gave me a refund for the first few issues mailed at a higher rate. Second class made my survival possible. Though I was regarded in the paranoid atmosphere of those McCarthy years simply and plainly as a Red, I had no trouble whatsoever with the postoffice. No political questions were asked me. I was treated with the utmost courtesy by the postal authorities then and since. It is no small testimonial to the strength of the First amendment that a new publication could be launched in those years with what amounts to a postal subsidy to a left-wing journalist.

I had two basic decisions to make when I started, one business, the other editorial. The first was whether to go out and raise money for promotion and try to grow fast, or concentrate my energies on doing as good a job as possible and hope that the quality would sooner or later attract a larger audience. I felt that no matter how much money I could raise, a radical publication in the atmosphere of 1953 could only grow slowly anyway; that money-raising was too exhausting and humiliating, and would leave me too little time and strength for reporting and writing. I have never regretted that decision, though the *Weekly* at first grew very slowly.*

The other, the editorial, decision was the character of the new paper. I decided to do a radical paper in conservative format, with lovely typography (Garamond, an old French face, was the basic type I chose), to eschew sensational headlines, to document what I had to say from governmental and standard sources. I wanted a paper which would be sober in statement and as accurate as I could make it. I wanted a paper which a campus reader, in the hostile atmosphere of that time,

From Our Tribute To Einstein

A world made up only of statistical probabilities offended his profoundest instincts; he was like Bach or Beethoven, striving for new harmonies, but with the tools of mathematics and physics. . . . The man who sought a new harmony in the heavens and in the atom also sought for order and justice in the relations of men . . . he fought Fascism everywhere and feared the signs of it in our own country. . . . His was a beautiful and satisfying life, and nothing would have pleased him more than how many—and such diverse—people remember him with affection, especially the children of the neighborhood in Princeton who recall the cookies he gave them. In that Olympus where he goes to dwell with his few peers, this is something all his own. Newton and Copernicus and the misty Pythagoras, too, could sweep the heavens with their grasp—but none of them were remembered by so many humble friends, for so many simple human kindnesses. In this realm, far beyond politics and physics, Einstein reigns alone in warm human memory.

—From the Weekly *of April 25, 1955.*

***Here are some basic figures on average circulation as reported every September to the postoffice under second class mail regulations. I hit 10,000 in 1955 but it took eight years more until I reached 20,000 in 1963. In 1968, the first year of publication as a bi-weekly, I reached 40,000. It was 50,000 in 1969, 60,000 in 1970 and 70,000 this year.**

From My Article on The Six-Day War Which Has Been So Unfairly Distorted

Israel's swift and brilliant military victory only makes its reconciliation with the Arabs more urgent. Its future and world peace call for a general and final settlement now of the Palestine problem. The cornerstone of that settlement must be to find new homes for the Arab refugees, some within Israel, some outside it, all with compensation for their lost lands and properties. The world Jewish community, already girding itself for a huge financial effort to aid Israel, should be thankful that its victory has come with so little loss of life or damage to either side. The same funds can now be diverted to a constructive and human cause. It was a moral tragedy—to which no Jew worthy of our best Prophetic tradition could be insensitive—that a kindred people was made homeless in the task of finding new homes for the remnants of the Hitler holocaust. Now is the time to right that wrong, to show magnanimity in victory, and to lay the foundations of a new order in the Middle East in which Israeli and Arab can live in peace . . .

Abba Eban exultantly called the sweep of Israel's armies "the finest day in Israel's modern history." The finest day will be the day it achieves reconciliation with the Arabs. To achieve it will require an act of sympathy worthy of the best in Jewry's Biblical heritage. It is to understand and forgive an enemy, and thus convert him into a friend. A certain obtuseness was unfortunately evident in Eban's brilliant presentation to the Security Council. To rest a case on Jewish homelessness and refuse at the same time to see the Arabs who have been made homeless is only another illustration of the tribal blindness which plagues the human race and plunges it constantly into bloodshed. The first step toward reconciliation is to see that Arab bitterness has real and deep roots. . . . Israel cannot live very long in a hostile Arab sea . . . No quickie military victories should blind it to the inescapable—in the long run it cannot defeat the Arabs. It must join them. The Jews played a great role in Arabic civilization in the Middle Ages. A Jewish state can play a similar role in a new Semitic rennaissance. This is the perspective of safety, of honor and of fraternity.

—"The Harder Battle and the Nobler Victory" 6/12/67.

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The No. 1 Task: A Synthesis of Socialism and Freedom

From The Secretary General of The United Nations

I received with much sadness your circular letter giving the news that your Bi-Weekly will discontinue publication as of the first of the year. During 19 years of independent reporting and publishing, you have set a pattern of objectivity and courage, and have shown great steadfastness in the cause of peace and justice. Your magazine will be sorely missed.

—U Thant, in a letter to I. F. Stone, Dec. 9.

could pass on to a conservative colleague without having it dismissed as just another hysterical rag. People on the other side might not agree but, if they read me at all, would have to take my findings and analysis seriously. I decided to make no claim to "inside stuff" or private sources in the government since I had none and was unlikely to get any in the McCarthy era, when public officials were too intimidated to leak material to a left-wing newspaperman, or even be seen talking to one. Finally I wanted the paper to have readability, humor and grace. I dreamed of taking the flotsam of the week's news and making it sing. I had a vision of a paper which would be urbane, erudite and witty; with substance, but as light as a soufflé. Needless to say I rarely felt that I had succeeded but that was my idealized image of what I wanted the *Weekly* to be.

The Price Was Ostracism

The early years were lonely. I am naturally gregarious but found myself ostracized. I was sustained by my readers. No one ever had a more loving audience,* and the letters (few of which—please forgive me—I was ever able to answer) made up for the coldness of Washington. No one could have been happier than I have been with the *Weekly*. To give a little comfort to the oppressed, to write the truth exactly as I saw it, to make no compromises other than those of quality imposed by my own inadequacies, to be free to follow no master other than my own compulsions, to live up to my idealized image of what a true newspaperman should be, and still be able to make a living for my family—what more could a man ask?

***Nor a friendlier bunch than at McDonald & Eudy, my printers for the past 18 years, to whom I am grateful.**

From "In Defense of The Campus Rebels"

Lifelong dissent has more than acclimated me cheerfully to defeat. It has made me suspicious of victory. I see every insight degenerating into a dogma, and fresh thoughts freezing into lifeless party line. Those who set out nobly to be their brother's keeper sometimes end up by becoming his jailer. Every emancipation has in it the seeds of a new slavery. But these perspectives, which seem so irrefutably clear from a pillar in the desert, are worthless to those enmeshed in the struggle. They are no better than mystical nonsense to the humane student who has to face his draft board, the dissident soldier who is determined not to fight, the black who sees his people doomed by shackles stronger than slavery to racial humiliation and decay. The business of the moment is to end the war, to break the growing dominance of the military in our society, to liberate the blacks, the Mexican-American, the Puerto Rican and the Indian from injustice. This is the business of our best youth. However confused and chaotic, their unwillingness to submit any longer is our best hope.

—From the Weekly *of May 19, 1969.*

I have been able to live in accordance with my beliefs. Politically I believe there cannot be a good society without freedom of criticism; the greatest task of our time is to find a synthesis of socialism and freedom. Philosophically I believe that a man's life reduces itself ultimately to a faith—the fundamental is beyond proof—and that faith is a matter of aesthetics, a sense of beauty and harmony. I think every man is his own Pygmalion, and spends his life fashioning himself. And in fashioning himself, for good or ill, he fashions the human race and its future. *December 14*

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO READERS AND LIBRARIANS: The annual index is being prepared as usual. If you send a long stamped self-addressed envelope we will mail you a free copy as soon as it is ready.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The *Weekly* is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, a subsidiary of Xerox. I would welcome bids for the right to reprint full size. Three books made up of collected pieces from the *Weekly* and the *New York Review of Books* are in print: *The Haunted Fifties, In A Time of Torment and Polemics and Prophecies*, in hard cover by Random House, and the first two in paperback by Vintage, its paperback affiliate which also published (with *New York Review*) *The Killings at Kent State: How Murder Went Unpunished.* Monthly Review Press has reprinted in both hard cover and paper my *Hidden History of the Korean War*, a book which has given rise to much distorted criticism, usually by people who have never read it. Next Fall, Random House and Vintage will reprint *The Truman Era: How The Cold War Started*, a collection of my best pieces from the New York Daily Compass, which was originally published by Monthly Review Press in 1952 and like the *Hidden History*, has long been out of print. Next Spring, Penguin will publish in England an *I. F. Stone Reader*, made up of pieces from the *Weekly* specially selected by Neil Middleton. My other books, *The Court Disposes* (1937), *Business As Usual* (1941), *Underground to Palestine* (1946) and *This Is Israel* (1948), are out of print.

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